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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6573
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000991

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/31/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: COUNCIL OF MINISTERS SECRETARY-GENERAL DISCUSSES
IHEC BUDGET, DE-BAATHIFICATION COMMISSION, AND CRISIS IN
BASRAH

REF: BAGHDAD 0980

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d)

¶1. (C) During their weekly meeting at the Council of Ministers Secretariat (COMSEC) on March 31, 2008, Council of Ministers Secretary-General Ali Ala'aq and Poloff followed up on several issues that had been raised in a previous meeting (Reftel). Ala'aq told Poloff the COM had some issues with the proposed budget that was recently submitted by the Independent High Electoral Committee (IHEC). According to Ala'aq, the COM has requested further clarification on a number of items contained in this budget, which will cover voter registration activities. Nevertheless, he stated that it will be presented to the COM for review when they next meet, which could be as early as tomorrow, April 1. When asked about the progress of the Elections Law, Ala'aq deflected the question, criticizing the inefficacy of the Council of Representatives and their inability to reach quorum in the last few days. When pressed, Ala'aq attempted to assuage Poloff's doubts by saying that the PM and the COM were focused on this issue.

¶2. (C) Responding to Poloff's question about the progress of the De-Baathification Commission and whether he had conferred with the PM on this matter, which he promised to do in the previous week's meeting, Ala'aq said that he had brought it up with the PM, but unfortunately the following day the PM traveled to Basrah to launch the offensive against the JAM SG criminal elements in that city and they had not had a chance to discuss the matter further. Reminded that the 60-day deadline that individuals had to petition the De-Baathification Commission for reinstatement was April 15, Ala'aq seemed disinterested, finally saying he would bring it up again when the occasion permitted. When questioned by Poloff whether he or the PM had given any thought to potential commission members, Ala'aq responded that they had not.

¶3. (C) Questioned by Poloff about the course of events in Basrah, Ala'aq stated that the PM had personally taken charge of the operation to root out the criminal elements from that city, but that he and the ISF had been somewhat surprised by the tenacity of the JAM SG forces. Nonetheless, he seemed confident that the offensive had turned a corner, commenting that after a few initial setbacks the ISF was now regaining control of the city. When asked if he had been in contact with the PM, Ala'aq said that they had spoken, but did not indicate how recently. He also grudgingly praised the COR for not supporting the Sadrist's call for a vote of no-confidence. Before concluding the meeting, Ala'aq reiterated that the Cabinet would most likely meet on Tuesday, even if the PM and other ministers currently in Basrah could not attend.
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